

ENGLISH  
YEAR 11

**GATTACA Scene Analysis**

*We are studying this text as a 'film narrative', which means we are not looking at themes and ideas so much as we are looking at the way the story is made, the way the narrator is telling the story .  
Your job, therefore, is to decide what the narrative goals of a particular scene or sequence are, and then specify what film techniques have been used to assist with the telling of the story.*

Example: The film from 00:00 to 8:41

We looked at the opening sequence of the film, in which we decided that the story itself was very simple... (Much of this is summary and can be used with the notes that we have already taken in class).

- A man is exfoliating his body with extreme care. He is thorough and determined... we imagine this would be difficult and painful. He also cuts his fingernails and some stray hairs.
- He burns the results of this activity in a place that resembles a laboratory.
- He straps a urine pouch to his leg, which he retrieves from a refrigerator that also contains blood pouches.
- He inserts a small amount of blood into a false fingertip, which he then adheres to his index finger.
- He dresses and goes to work.
- A large number of people are arriving at the same workplace.
- They all enter via a turnstile in which they must give a small blood sample, acquired from their index finger by a finger-prick apparatus which tests the blood and declares the person 'VALID'.
- We are informed that this is in the 'not too distant future'.
- He works at a computer, with which he seems to be making navigational calculations.
- He cleans his keyboard with a small vacuum device.
- He has a conversation with an older man. They discuss his proficiency and cleanliness, and his upcoming 'mission' which is set for one week hence. He expresses concern about the mission's prospects of going ahead. We learn that his name is 'Jerome'.
- The older man informs him that he has 'a substance test'.

- He surreptitiously reveals a bottle of a substance which resembles flakes of skin, which he sprinkles over his keyboard, and a hair which he slips between the teeth of a comb in this desk drawer.
- He takes the test in a small laboratory, by providing a urine sample in the presence of a laboratory technician. The technician discusses the 'impressiveness' of Jerome's penis. The technician introduces the subject of his son.  
His urine is tested, and the machine confirms his identity.  
Jerome shows little interest in engaging with the technician's conversation, and even declines to enthuse about his upcoming mission.
- Jerome is approached by a woman who also discusses the mission, and suggests to him that his interest is actually intense, but that he is attempting to hide it.  
We learn that he watches every launch every day, which can number in excess of twelve.
- A voice-over begins (VO), in which we learn the background of the character, Jerome. We learn:
  - He is a Navigator
  - He is about to leave on a mission to Titan
  - He was predestined to go on this mission from birth, due to his genetic superiority
  - But, the character we have known as Jerome is a fraud

***This scene is intercut with an image of a crowd milling around a pool of blood, and the suggestion of a corpse.***

However, an enormous amount of the meaning of the scene is not taken from the factual detail as described above. Look at the scene when the narrative, the 'craft of the making of the film' is inserted: (New comments are underlined.)

- Before the action being, we hear a sound. It is a musical effect that implies tension, peril. The screen is blue, there is nothing upon which the eye can focus, sound FX continue with the suggestion of climax as large objects fall, fill the screen and strike the ground. SOUND implies huge impact as the image is presented in slow-motion (Visual FX). The suggestion is that something of major importance has just occurred. This is the kind of imagery that might accompany a plane crash or an avalanche. The 'raining down' of objects continues, and we begin to realise that they are fragments of fingernails and hair. The Visual FX give us a perspective of these tiny events being important BECAUSE of the way that you have been provided with a Point of View that implies these events are much, much larger than you. (For example, the CAMERA MOVEMENT during this scene has a long, slow PAN that takes in a length of hair as if it is a huge object.)
- A man is exfoliating his body with extreme care. He is thorough and determined... we imagine this would be difficult and painful. He also cuts his fingernails and some stray hairs.
- The scene is awash with blue (lighting, colour filtering, FX). We see the person who is engaged in this activity. We do not see him in any kind of detail. This method of Shot Selection and Framing causes the subject to be slowly revealed; we have tantalising glimpses of some

detail, so that we are focusing on this character, hoping to see/know more. This is called, in narrative method, 'engaging the audience'; we want to know more, we engage with the information and we are drawn into the direction of the story; (CHARACTERISATION).

MUSIC begins, which has the qualities of sadness, of a grand story (a journey, with a suggestion of hope).

- He burns the results of this activity in a place that resembles a laboratory. The use of this SETTING continues this process of engaging the audience; we are asking questions of the narrative: who is this person? Why is he doing this? Where is he?  
The setting is in keeping with the activity. He seems to be engaged in a scientific process.
- He straps a urine pouch to his leg, which he retrieves from a refrigerator that also contains blood pouches. The audience is further engaged: a strong narrative causes the audience to ask questions that draw them further into their DRAMATIC EXPECTATION of the story. Questions are about conflicts and problems, and how they will be resolved.
- He inserts a small amount of blood into a false fingertip, which he then adheres to his index finger. The same VISUAL MOTIF is employed. This is a small action with huge implications. The MUSIC continues as we, the audience ask more questions.
- He dresses and goes to work.
- A large number of people are arriving at the same workplace. This scene uses particularly effective visual imagery:
  - All of the characters have their back to us, which causes us to see them as anonymous, robotic. This is enhanced by the consistent colour of the COSTUME. They move from a diffuse mass into these simple channels as they queue for the turnstiles. The VISUAL MOTIF suggests uniformity, conformity, dehumanisation.
- They all enter via a turnstile in which they must give a small blood sample, acquired from their index finger. The ECU (extreme close-up) again suggests the importance of this apparently trivial act. The VISUAL REFERENCING, COLOUR CODING and MOVEMENT OF ACTORS in the narrative point us very powerfully to one of the key themes of the text; that of our genetic identity being more important than virtually anything else about our identity, and in fact negating other aspects of our 'human personae'.
- The building (SETTING) is very modern. It has a structure that is simple and linear, projecting an imposing atmosphere with upward movement and a less-than-human perspective. This enhances our sense of the kind of world that is hinted at by the movement of characters in the previous SHOT.  
The figure of Jerome is the only character whose face we see. This NARRATIVE DEVICE further underlines that he is a central character. This is the first time we see him plainly.  
Significantly, the sequence then gives us Irene in the same perspective: she also comes up the elevator (ACTION, FRAMING, CAMERA MOVEMENT AND SETTING are all identical) she is

FRAMED in the same way, which suggests that she has equal importance in the narrative.

Her ACTING suggests that she is watching Jerome. This suggests the beginning of a subplot. (A storyline in the narrative that is NOT the main storyline, but which will, by the end of the narrative, be closely related to it. In fact, well-constructed subplots tend to be crucial to the **resolution** of the narrative.)

- We are informed that this is in the 'not too distant future'. Use of TITLES often allows the audience to be told something explicitly, rather than working the information into DIALOGUE.
- He works at a computer, with which he seems to be making navigational calculations. The use of CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) gives the audience a glimpse into the world of Jerome. The FOCUS (ACTING) on this face suggests his intense concentration. His acting in the scene, the first in which he speaks, is deliberately robotic. He does not respond emotionally to compliments or to discussion about 'the mission', even though they seem to be very important. The narrative goal related to this narrative choice is simple: we are invited to see Jerome as a precise, controlled automaton... he IS Gattaca, that is, his personae reflects the inhuman precision required by the world of 'ideal humans'.  
This lack-of-human-engagement continues into the scene with the lab technician.  
Note also the EDITING in this scene: SHOT SELECTION has Jerome's face reflected in the screen of his computer, implying his engagement and passion.
- He cleans his keyboard with a small vacuum device.
- He has a conversation with an older man. They discuss his proficiency and cleanliness, and his upcoming 'mission' which is set for one week hence. He expresses concern about the mission's prospects of going ahead. We learn that his name is 'Jerome'. The arrival of the 'Director' is presaged by the use of SOUND, the ominous, echoing footfall, like an approaching menace. Remember that we are soon to learn that 'Jerome' is constantly living under his own 'Sword of Damocles': he is constantly expecting exposure, and for his carefully constructed subterfuge to be dismantled. These echoing footsteps, which could have meant so much, mean little... this time.
- The older man informs him that he has 'a substance test'.
- He surreptitiously reveals a bottle of a substance which resembles flakes of skin, which he sprinkles over his keyboard, and a hair which he slips between the teeth of a comb in this desk drawer. The ECU clearly indicates the importance of the activity. We as the audience continue to ask questions; we cannot answer them yet, so we speculate... this is obviously a stealthy activity so we ask ourselves many questions:
  - Who is he really?
  - What/why is he doing?
  - What is he hiding?
  - What is this place?

- He takes the test in, a small laboratory, by providing a urine sample in the presence of a laboratory technician who discusses the 'impressiveness' of Jerome's penis, and introduces the subject of his son.

His urine is tested, and the machine confirms his identity.

Jerome shows little interest in engaging with the technician's conversation, and even declines to enthuse about his upcoming mission. This introduces the second subplot: the technician's engagement with Jerome. As with the first (Irene) this subplot seems to have little relationship with 'Jerome's' machinations, but has critical relevance by the end. In fact, like our DNA, his tiny, immeasurable element becomes the linchpin that has always held the story together. The Lab Technician, literally, could have destroyed the plan on the first day.

- Jerome is approached by a woman who also discusses the mission, and suggests to him that his interest is actually intense, but that he is attempting to hide it. This element of SCRIPT adds to the subplot of Jerome's relationship with Irene, and adds further intriguing information about the main character: If you watch the ACTING carefully, you will see Jerome's intense interest in the spectacle of the launch, which he masks behind a controlled face the moment he is aware of Irene's presence.

We learn that he watches every launch every day, which can number in excess of twelve.

- A voice-over begins (VO), in which we learn the background of the character, Jerome. We learn:

- He is a Navigator
- He is about to leave on a mission to Titan
- He was predestined to go on this mission from birth, due to his genetic superiority
- But, the character we have known as Jerome is a fraud

***This scene is intercut with an image of a crowd milling around a pool of blood, and the suggestion of a corpse.***

A well-constructed opening sequence works this way:

- The narrative must begin with us, the audience, being allowed to know only as much as we need in order to begin seeking answers. We are NOT allowed to know as much as any individual character.
- The key Story Elements are explained, they are:
  - Characters
  - Setting
  - Storyline
  - Time (in terms of chronological and historical time)
  - Character Point of View, (through whose eyes are you viewing the narrative?)
  - Multiple storylines
    - Jerome
    - Irene
    - This place

- We are invited to ask questions about ALL of these Story Elements. This causes us to have a sense of ENGAGEMENT and DRAMATIC EXPECTATION; we want to know more.
- The narrative, once we have a sense of who, when, where and why, introduces complication (CONFLICT). Now that we have an intellectual and emotional stake in the film, its CLIMAX (the part of the story in which all of the questions at the beginning are answered) becomes important... we must watch... we must know.

So: this document will be the basis of our class today. I'd like you to read it thoroughly, while the first nine minutes of the narrative plays, and prepare post-its for any part of it you don't understand.

This will be your preliminary work to prepare you for a written analysis of another sequence of this narrative. The key skills you will require are all demonstrated above.

